



Are migrant workers satisfied with public rental housing? A study in Chongqing, China



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ABSTRACT

In China, the public rental housing (PRH), as the only form of public housing migrant workers have access to, plays a critical role in accommodating necessary workforce for urban development. Therefore, it is imperative to improve the residential satisfaction in order to retain these migrant workers. This study aims to explore migrant workers' residential satisfaction with PRH and their moving intentions in Chongqing, where an ambitious PRH programs has been launched recently. 31 housing attributes were identified as a result of extensive literature review. This is followed by a questionnaire survey with migrant workers from 8 completed and occupied PRH residential districts. Results showed that the overall residential satisfaction of migrant workers was moderate. Similarly, housing quality, supporting facilities, and estate management and services are found strongly associated with residential (dis) satisfaction. There is a close relationship between residential satisfaction and moving intention. Similarly, this study revealed that various socio-economic characteristics (e.g. education, income, marriage and housing type) have significant effects on the moving intention. This research sheds some lights on sustainable development of PRH program in China and provides useful evidence for future studies on public housing issues in developing countries.

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1. Introduction

China has been experiencing unprecedented considerable internal migration driven by both rapid urbanization and economic development (Lin, Zhang, & Geertman, 2015; Wu, Zhang, Skitmore, Song, & Hui, 2014; Zhang, 2016). Statistics show that the amount of rural-to-urban migrant workers, who leave their original places of household registration to find better job opportunities in cities, had reached 253 million by the end of 2014 and the figure is expected to reach 291 million in 2020 (Wang, 2015). These migrant workers mainly flow into the sectors of manufacturing and construction, making great contribution to the economic development, e.g.

nearly 23% of the GDP growth (NBS, 2014). Meanwhile, the number of skilled migrants increases significantly as a growing number of Chinese cities are transitioning from centres of production to centres of consumption as well as the expansion of higher education enrolment (Cui, Geertman, & Hooimeijer, 2014). Both of these two kinds of migrant groups have same inclination to become urban residents. As a “floating” population, migrant workers are defined as workers who live and work in cities but do not hold local urban resident status in accordance with the households registration system (Cheng & Wang, 2013; Lau & Chiu, 2013). According to Cui, Geerman, and Hooimeijer (2016), most college educated graduates prefer to move to major cities with an aspiration of upward social mobility, however, the skyrocketing housing price has even forced them to leave. Housing affordability might be a pressing issue preventing rural-to-urban migrant workers to settle down permanently in cities (Tao, Hui, Wong, & Chen, 2015). Due to institutional factors such as household's registration, rural-to-urban migrant workers and new college graduates have been denied from the local traditional public housing system. They have no

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choice but to settle in substandard housing (e.g. villages in city) with overcrowded spaces, poor facilities, and become a permanent urban underclass. Therefore, the issue of housing plays a critical role for migrant workers to integrate into urban life.

Urban competitiveness is partly determined by the possess of migrant workers (Kim, Woosnam, Marcouiller, Aleshinloye, & Choi, 2015). In order to improve traditional public housing system, the public rental housing (PRH) were firstly introduced to the Chinese communities in March 2009 (Huang, 2012). PRH is a kind of rental public housing provided by either public or private agencies with government controlled rents. The main target population are: low income households with housing difficulties, new employees, and qualified migrant with stable jobs and residences in cities. The PRH, as the only form of public housing migrant workers have access to, has gained spotlight as future of public housing system in China. For instance, as stipulated in the National Twelfth Five-Year Plan, 36 million units of public housing will be built or renovated from 2011 to 2015, which places heavy focuses on PRH (Li, Chen, Hui, Yang, & Li, 2014). However, various issues associated with the PRH programs have been consistently reported by media including low housing quality, inferior locations, and poor design (Dang, Liu, & Zhang, 2014). Although the public housing programs provide accommodation, as renters, these migrant workers are likely to move due to lower moving cost compared to homeowners (Diaz-Serrano & Stoyanova, 2010). Thus, it is critical to provide satisfactory housing so that these migrant workers are attracted and retained. Public housing programs, as a mean of moving households to better neighbourhoods, are assumed to improve residential environment if they were accommodated by public housing. It is, therefore, necessary to examine the migrant workers' residential satisfaction once they were accommodated by public housing. Interventions could be introduced to improve the housing conditions of migrant workers. Thus, this study aims to investigate the residential satisfaction of migrant workers accommodating by public housing in China and explore critical factors to their moving intention.

2. Literature review

Residential satisfaction reflects the gap between one's reality and expectation which treats satisfaction as a function of how much one can acquire and how close his/her perceived situation is to the aspired-to level (Cheng & Wang, 2013). It is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct, and various attributes to which residents' response in relation to satisfaction can be categorized to various dimensions, e.g. housing unit, neighbourhood environment, estate management and services to social environment (Amole, 2009). As to the housing unit, the attributes include unit size (AF2), privacy (AF1), housing layout (AF3), indoor environment (AF4), housing quality, and related facilities (AF7) (Chen et al., 2013; Tao, Wong, & Hui, 2014). The housing quality covers the reasonable state of repair (AF5) as well as the spatial adaptability and flexibility (AF6) (Aigbavboa & Thwala, 2013; Lee & Park, 2011). It is well recognized that the neighbourhood environment is influential to residential satisfaction such as public facilities of transportation (AF8), education (AF10), cultural and sports (AF11), car parking (AF13), business and employment opportunities (AF14), medical care (AF16), social welfares (AF15), community management (AF19), commercial facilities (AF17), public space such as landscape and scenery (AF18), distance to workplaces (AF9) (Huang & Du, 2015; Ibem & Amole, 2013; Mohit, Ibranhim, & Rashid, 2010). Similarly, housing with available space for children playing (AF12) and convenience for residential purpose (AF20) is likely to enjoy higher level of residential satisfaction (Dekker, Vos, Musterd, Kempen, 2011; Ibem & Amole, 2013). Estate management and services, such as security of life and property (AF23), the cleanliness

of the community (AF21), the quality of management and services (AF22; AF24; AF25), related facilities and services (AF25; AF27), and the facility management fee (AF26), are the key factors leading to residential satisfaction (Chen et al., 2013; Ibem & Aduwo, 2013; Tao et al., 2014). The social environment, comprising by the attributes of social relations (AF31), communal activities (AF29), cultural values (AF30), and crimes (AF28), has influences on residential satisfaction (Huang & Du, 2015). Besides, the residential satisfaction is more likely a subjective measurement, subject to household characteristics such as age, sex, household, size, income, education, marriage, residence length and so on (Ibem & Aduwo, 2013; Mohit & Mahfoud, 2015; Tao et al., 2014).

As Speare (1974) argued, residential stress is the deciding factor for moving intention. In other words, high residential satisfaction creates stability in the neighbourhood, and low residential satisfaction may lead to residential moving as a way of relieving residential stress (Dekker et al., 2011). However, some households might postpone or put off the desire to move when facing residential dissatisfaction because of related restrictions and constraints (Groot, Mulder, Das, & Manting, 2011). To solve conflicts between residential satisfaction and actual mobility behaviour, a new concept, moving intention, was developed to understand the decision making process of residential mobility (Fang, 2006). Since the seminal work of Speare (1974), a number of studies have been conducted to examine the relationship between residential satisfaction and consider moving. For instance, Landale and Guest (1985) found that residential satisfaction is a strong predictor of thoughts of moving. This indicates lower satisfaction is closely associated with higher mobility. The attitudinal variables, e.g. residential satisfaction and mobility intentions, are critical antecedents of migration decisions, but structural variables affects the extent to which intentions are translated into behaviour (Wu, 2006). Diaz-Serrano and Stoyanova (2010) suggested that there is positive correlation between housing satisfaction and mobility while the housing satisfaction has mediating effects between residential characteristics and residents' mobility propensities. M.Gibler, Tyvimaa, and Kananen (2014) found that dissatisfaction with housing conditions is related to moving intention from residents in Finnish rental multifamily buildings. These studies provide valuable information about the perceptions of and attitudes towards housing environment which facilitates a better understanding of migrants' adaptation and has important implications for housing-related policies. These include what circumstance that an individuals is likely to move, and what sociodemographic characteristics distinguish migrants from no migrants (Cui, Geertman, & Hooimeijer, 2015).

In summary, extensive literature review showed that residential satisfaction is consisted of four dimensions, i.e. housing units, neighbourhood environment, estate management and services, and social environment (see Table 3). Similarly, it is affected by household characteristics. Besides, residential satisfaction, as an attitude response toward housing environment, has close relationship with moving intentions.

3. Research methodologies

3.1. Study area and data collection

Chongqing is selected as it is transiting from a city sending out migrant workers to a city absorbing migrant workers. In 2015, the GDP growth rate of Chongqing was 11%, 4.1% higher than the national average, suggesting the city's competitiveness and attractiveness to migrant workers. In order to attract and retain skilled migrant labours, nearly 40 million m² of PRH were built since 2011. Meanwhile, there is no upper income limit or household

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